

DOUBLE-EDGED INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS. WHEN VIOLENCE HAS A COMPLICITY BETWEEN VICTIM AND EXECUTIONER

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Abstract: *Violence is nowadays more and more present not only in wars and conflicts, but also in society; omnipresent across gender and generations in everyday people's lives, violence seems to acquire new features and expressions and, moreover, from a structural dimension, becomes part of about common-sense daily character life of most ordinary people. The present study shows the results of an enquiry carried out with semi-structured interviews. The answers point at normalization and ambivalence of the phenomenon in which the power of both partners and from one to the other is pivotal.*

Keywords: *violence, addiction, resistance, force, power.*

1. Introduction

As remembered in the Spirit of Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, compiled on September 2016 (Šimonović, 2016) there is a connection between discrimination and violence against women, as if the former may be a fertile ground and prerequisite for the growing of the latter.

The analysis of violence against women has developed a long debate, often, for the most part, psychological, finds its summary references, in addition to other literature quoted elsewhere in our text, also at least in Browne, 1993; Bachman, 1994; Heise, 1998; Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005; Mibenge, 2014. Violence against women has been historically defined as any act of "gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of acts such as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (United Nations General Assembly, 1993).

Over time women have started a process of reflexion and transformation with a view to increase their empowerment, fulfil market logics and further develop their identity in a context of mutual understanding. Unfortunately, this process has been slowed down by men's hesitation to look for new ways of communicating with the other sex. The

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relations proved to be asymmetric once again in the light of partners' conviction that relations are static and cannot be modified, assuming sometimes the traits of possession. The autonomy and revocability of friendships and love relations risks sometimes acquiring addiction traits – perceived or induced – with a subsequent incapacity to control personal behaviour even in case of possible violence.

Over time violence has been the object of numerous analyses and debates, about its genesis, inside or/and outside the family, distinguishing domestic violence along several main types as physical, sexual, emotional, financial, spiritual, social abuse, and stalking (Woodyatt, & Stephenson, 2016)², but also with a new perspectives e.g. showing the social reactions to intimate partner violence disclosure and associations as normal life between woman and man (Woerner, Wyatt, & Sullivan, 2018). In front of these behaviours women have started a process of reflection and transformation of their own attitudes, with a view to increase their empowerment, fulfil market logics and further develop their identity in a context of mutual understanding. Unfortunately, this process has been slowed down by men's hesitation to look for new ways of communicating with the other sex. The relations proved to be asymmetric once again in the light of partners' conviction that relations are static and cannot be modified, assuming sometimes the traits of possession. The autonomy and revocability of friendships and love relations risks sometimes acquiring addiction traits- perceived or induced – with a subsequent incapacity to control personal behaviour even in case of a possible violence. In the last years these remarks have been confirmed by a constant availability of new data on violence against women, mainly from research conducted by women, almost always without a reaction. And this behaviour surprises as it is displayed by from persons who have acquired, and in many matters strengthened, a public role. During the period 1995-2014, 102 countries conducted at least one survey addressing violence against women that produced representative results at the national level, - either as a dedicated survey (51 countries) or as a module attached to a wider survey (64 countries). Some countries implemented both types of surveys. Forty-four countries undertook a survey in the period 1995-2004 and 89 countries did so in the period 2005-2014, suggesting growing interest in this issue. More than 40 countries conducted at least two surveys in the period 1995-2014 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2015, p. 40).

2. The Debate on Violence

More than forty years ago Randall Collins drew attention to some elements which were bringing a change in the dictionary of violence: In our contemporary society, ferocious cruelty increase "(...) ascetic cruelty has had its ups and downs, cresting during periods of mobilized (...) it is no longer part of the dominant ceremonial order, (...) but at the same time, the dangers of callousness increase" (Collins, 1974, p. 440). it was a warning of a progressive normalcy of the violence whose general and particular debate moved from previously basic historical, social and political observations (Arendt, 1964; 1970; Benjamin, 1920; Sorel, 1906; Weil, 1965), to partial ones (Bell, 1960), being then

² For interesting approach which connects violence against women to various ages of their life, from infancy to elderly, just in 1999 the Monee project presented an along ages organized analysis (Monee, 1999).

linked to a new dictionary (Whiteson, 2007); and the further generalizations and in depth analyses (Balibar, 1997; Howe, 2016; Sen, 2006; Sofsky, 1995; Žižek, 2008;). In this debate probably the old Weil's quotation best exemplifies the indisputably dehumanizing role of violence: "*Nothing has the power to interpose between its impulse and act. ... Thus the violence obliterates anybody who feels its touch. It comes to seem just as external to its employer as to its victim. And from these springs the idea of a destiny before which executioner and victim stand equally innocent, before which conquered and conqueror are brothers in the same distress*" (Weil, 1965, p. 17). But the debate, in its variety investigated more and more fields in globalization, widening interdisciplinary roots of the analysis (Gomez, Verdù, Gonzales-Megias, & Mendez, 2016) and paying growing attention to cultural historical long paths (Pinker, 2012). Our research, nurtured also from these studies, has however its reference research in that connected to violence against women. Actually these pages have a double connection, one, more general, with historical forms of violence, its spread and its statistical decrease during the twentieth century (just quoted Pinker's study, in advance the overall number of murders declines) and another one which points out "the dangerous world" (Preble, & Muller, 2014; Smith, 2011) and the continuous presence of violence in each space of the world as showed in Strand and Storey (2018). Last but not least the emergent question of the ambivalence of violence in an intimate relationship (Shaw, 2013).

3. Sampling

The considerations presented here are the result of a qualitative enquiry focussing on violence perpetration against women in the city of Salerno. The present work shows only the reasons underpinning violence between spouses, partners and fiancés. Forty-five women were interviewed upon their consent, following a previous research carried out in Salerno from 2014 and 2015.

Women selected for this study were part of a larger survey, known as the Anti-Violence Urban Network, collecting data through questionnaire administration. Eighty-two women gave their consent to a second interview, but 37 backed out after an initial desire to share their experience. In conclusion, 45 women took part in the enquiry.

Researchers preferred not to insist in order to avoid further pressure on these women. The 45 semi-structured interviews were carried out in Salerno. The contact proved sometimes difficult since women were afraid of being recognized or identified, or were scared by their husbands and partners' possible reactions. Sometimes they showed contradictory stances with the interviewer. The sampling was divided per age and qualification. Fifteen women were aged between 20 and 29; among them, 10 had a diploma and 5 a degree. Fourteen women were aged between 40 and 49; among them, 8 had a degree, 5 a diploma and 1 a licence. Six women were aged between 50 and 59; among them, 1 had a degree, 3 a licence and 1 a diploma.

Women's grouping according to age and qualification

Table 1

| Qualification | Age | | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--|-------|
| | 20- 29 | 30 - 39 | 40– 49 | 50 - 59 | | |
| Diploma | 10 | 6 | 8 | 2 | | 26 |
| Degree | 5 | 4 | 5 | 1 | | 15 |
| Primary School Certificate | 0 | | 1 | 3 | | 4 |
| Total | 15 | 10 | 14 | 6 | | 45 |

We interviewed 14 men too after they gave their consent. In this case, age grouping was not possible since 4 of them were aged between 32 and 37 (2 with a degree and 2 with a diploma); 5 were aged between 38 and 46, (2 with a degree, 3 with a diploma); 5 were aged between 48 and 59 (2 with a degree, 2 a diploma, 1 a Primary School Certificate). Interviews were all carried out between March, 2016 and June, 2017.

4. Methods

A semi-structured interview guide was developed. The questions concerned the following topics: economic independence; economic dependence; love as new addiction; fear of loneliness; obsession and possession; routine as a form of dependence; strategies and defensive actions. These themes emerged clearly in all conversations with women. Instead, the role of dependence and reciprocity in abuse varied. Thus, this study reflects the grasp derived deductively from theoretical concepts as well as that derived inductively from narrative data. To protect the identity of the interviewees, each woman was given a pseudonym. In addition, no specific identifying information is linked to qualitative comments. Finally, without compromising the integrity of data, some details may be slightly changed in the discussion of findings to maintain anonymity.

5. Results

Women reported differently their experience. Women belonging to the first grouping, urged by a desire of independence and denunciation, pointed at the matter of citizenship right. Women belonging to the second grouping seemed to be pushed by a desire of overcoming a violent existence; women belonging to the third group proved to be almost resigned. Therefore, age should be recognized as a significant factor in violence perpetration that is nurtured by sedimentation.

An interesting datum is that 21 women out of 45 were economically independent and 9 of them continued to live with their partners with whom they had started a marriage counselling. Eight women out of 45 had a fulfilling job and 16 were not autonomous because of precarious jobs. As for violence, 7 women endured physical violence associated with psychological violence by both the person perpetrating violence and

those who were aware of the situation before or after the denunciation. Twenty-one women reported physical abuse and psychological violence; in 8 cases economic violence was also perpetrated. All episodes could be attributed to partners and husbands living together. Seventeen women reported cases of psychological violence only. When considering the author of violence in an intimate or familiar relation, it is interesting to note that women are not always the sole victim of violence. The percentage of those thinking that both partners are victims is almost the same (see Table 2). Women attribute this shame to both partners and this element emerged with no reference to age and education.

Table 2

Women defining the author and co-author of violence (by age and education)

| Violent subject | Age | | | | Total | Qualification | | | Total |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------|--------|---------|-------|
| | 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-59 | | Diploma | Degree | Licence | |
| | N | N | N. | N. | N. | N. | N. | N. | N. |
| Both | 9 | 5 | 9 | 1 | 24 | 12 | 8 | 1 | 21 |
| The man | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 21 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 16 |
| The woman | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 2 | | 8 |
| Total | 15 | 10 | 14 | 6 | | 26 | 15 | 4 | 45 |

On the other hand, long-lasting relations could sketch violence as a normal thing in a bidirectional process that could turn into resignation. A problem of interpretation is evident: what does it mean perceiving the man as the sole violence perpetrator or perceiving both partners as perpetrators? It has been shown that the perception of bidirectional violence leads to a “mystification of the phenomenon which can entail a loss of attention, solidarity and support to victims” (Cacioppo, 2001, p. 79). Even if the fear of underestimating this risk is understandable, the word “mystification” could lead to a perception of violence normalization. Here the problem nurses inside female emotions, in the perception of a sense of guilt or of regret almost such as in a disavowed inadequacy. On the other hand, excluding the idea that women too can be violent would risk eliminating *a priori* the fact that a woman can be a violent subject as well as the fact that a violent reaction can arise in response to abuse. However, the perception of violence normality in intimate relations does not mean that violence cannot – or couldn’t – be recognized. Not only is violence recognized, but sometimes it is justified as a form of outright addiction.

6. Love in Times of New Addictions

The Stony Brook University research published in 2011 in the Journal of Neurophysiology shows that dis-intoxicating from love is almost as difficult as dis-intoxicating from cocaine since love and cocaine activate the same areas of the brain.

Love addiction is therefore listed among new addictions with similar effects to substance abuse such as:

- Inebriation felt when together with the partner and only with the partner, impossible to reach alone;
- Tolerance then trying to share much time with the partner, renouncing personal time and outer contacts;
- Abstinence when the partner is not present. Life without the partner cannot even be imagined. The partner becomes the source of gratification, daily activities are no longer important, time with the partner is essential.
- Incapacity of controlling behaviour, reduction in clear mindedness and critical conscience which generates a feeling of shame, substituted by a temporary reacquisition of the critical sense followed by a frustration and relapse of the addiction. The need of being with the partner is more and more pressing accompanied by rage and shame.

While drugs are easier to be found, starting and keeping an intimate relationship is more difficult and can generate the obsessive fear of losing the beloved person. This translates into jealousy and possessiveness. Every single negative detail is magnified till a violent reaction towards the partner. The paradox is given by the idea of reciprocity and its related features according to which none of the partners should expect the other to have violent reactions in the light of what both of them have given to the relation.

Besides, the ambivalence of the impossibility of being together but the inevitability of being together is a common phenomenon despite violent episodes occurring.

(...) I hate him, but I miss him (...). I always say it is enough, but when I think of us, I want him. Just like cigarettes (...). I try giving up, I stop smoking for two days and then I start again. just like a drug. [Rosy_45 years, F, degree)

The victim wants to be freed by his or her aggressor. At the same time, the victim experiences the fear of being alone or feeling unsafe. This type of addiction is perpetrated by the stronger to the weaker who develops a need for continuity. The triggering element is the lack of self-esteem, the principle underpinning a relationship, and the relation prevails without that idea of reciprocity which is necessary to build up true intimacy. Each person, living a specific condition, oscillates between the need for stability and the desire for freedom. These contradictory trends influence human behaviour. It is commonly recognized that the desire for freedom is linked to separation and autonomy whereas the idea of stability is linked to dependence and interpenetration.

Humanity is sprinkled by the alternation of these feelings even if the competitive aspect has always prevailed. This predominance of the competitive aspect leads to further reflexions on the existential malaise translated into personal relations. The great majority of intimate relations prove that a spasmodic clash between the need for stability (fusion) and the desire for freedom (separation) occurs. The modern man is torn between the loss of being part of something and a new solitude (Bauman, 1999) and the desire – sometimes unachievable – for exclusive social relations.

In private spheres, freedom, personal autonomy, equality have remained dangerously connected to the idea of complementarity and fusion. The idea that a woman should care for the family and for her partner has legitimated behaviour urged by selfishness (oblativity) and submission.

Relations are nowadays set under the aegis of fugacity and rapidity, often in virtual worlds where, despite the impression of a greater safety, the same dangers paradoxically lie linked to reciprocity / recognition / safety of people and dependent relations. This kind of relation brings together those forms of obsession meant to control the other.

Another consideration that should be made on this matter is that public abuse is more often reported and therefore it is easier to manage and elaborate. The extraneity of the aggressor facilitates the observation of facts, allows a better elaboration of responsibility and faults, simplifies the overcoming of shame and reconciliation with the self. On the contrary, when the abuse is perpetrated by someone belonging to the private sphere, the abuse is often repeated over time as a result of a slow aggression developing in a silent or explicit emotional blackmail (Schwark & Bohner, 2019).

The “attribution theory” explains how people attribute faults of an event to their selves rather than to others, to variable or stable causes, controllable or uncontrollable elements. Furthermore, some models apply, such as coping strategies defined as the reaction to stressing or painful situations (Bulman, & Wortman, 1997).

Some women pointed at the solitude felt by both partners that lead the woman in general – fabler for her physical structure too – to believe that:

*(...) what could I do? It is better to have a partner rather than to be alone at 50 years old (Orchidea_51 years, F, licence);
I don't think he would kill me (...) when he becomes violent, I remain silent and everything goes back to normality (Dalia_39 years, F, degree).*

The second example recalls what Seligman (1975/1992) said, starting from some experiments on dogs which led to what is now known as “Learned Helplessness”, *i.e.* a sort of impotence which nurtures addiction and justifies all various triggers in the victim as well as in the aggressor.

*(...) what can I do in the end? I wait for the moment to pass (...) nobody can understand the situation, nobody can understand me (Edera_29 years, F, diploma);
(...) I have just her... she is the only person able to understand me (...). I know because she always forgives me (...) what should others know about me? (Gelsy_35 years, M, degree).*

In his Essay on Violence, Sofsky sketched out the loss of protective features in modern society where people are no longer ready to share misadventures and provide support and care (Sofsky, 1996, p. 63). Therefore, violent relations create dependence in the sense that partners can count on each other and on a comprehension that others could not show. This dependence sometimes plunges its roots in cultural discrimination and is always linked to traditions based on race, sex, language, religion and inferiority that re-occur over time.

7. Emotional Addiction and Violence Perpetration

Violence crosses generations even if with specific features at each time. In this case, it should be recognized that the transformation of decision-making roles and the new interpretation of women related to their new presence in public spaces and newer and newer experiences play a role.

(...) Before, no (...) when I started to work again, he began saying that he wanted me to stay at home with children and then (...) well, I've always justified his behaviour, I know he loves me (...) (Rosy_45 years, F, degree).

For several reasons, the new role of women and their progressive development in gender relations question all patriarchal hierarchy as well as all modern power, especially in men, generating frequent crisis and uncertainties linked to male roles and related behaviour. Living a violent relation is no more than experiencing drug addiction. A change in roles occurs and affects communication in terms of relations, social presence and familiar contribution. Despite the absence of synchronic and uniformed features, the crisis of patriarchal rules and a progressive empowerment of women is evident. The changes experienced in women's life linked to work, external relations and other factors lay the foundations of men's crisis, reactions, violence engendered by the perception of losing power and control over the partner and her interests and behaviours. The partner feels the loss of centrality in relation, where he becomes a part of it and not the centre of it. The question is – and in fact it could be – whether the greater empowerment of women does determine, and how, an increase in tension between genders, whether violence and power are present in this tension and how they can be interpreted.

Power and violence constitute a combination – a sort of overarching theme - that can explain the various conflicts ending up in tragedies sometimes, but that could also be inverted in its components -thus, violence and power - where violence tends to replace reasoning, and relation (of dominance) with the illusion of control (Corradi, 2008; 2016).

Is violence the implicit admission of impotence (Žižek, 2007) or rather the most flagrant act of power?

The answer is about analysing the core difference between power and violence. It has also been underlined that, behind the reflexion on power, there should be another – broader – reflexion on human being as it would not be possible to analyse power without considering anthropologic premises. Among these premises, human vulnerability and the descending need for establishing relations that make life and coexistence safer should be taken into account. Starting from this consideration, power acquires a double action: on the one hand, the power to offend; on the other hand, the power to defend. This ambivalence is intrinsic to power itself. The power to offend corresponds to the power of damage in general, *i.e.* the power to harm someone physically. This behaviour - going from physical offence to humiliation and exclusion - culminates in the definition of violence. If this behaviour is exacerbated and brought to

its worst point, violence occurs. In his *Phenomenology of Power* (1992), Popitz defines the offensive power as a pure act of power, underlining that this power is open to uncontrolled instincts, irrespective of rules, therefore non-submitted to discipline. To better understand Popitz's theory, the example of a couple having a clash could give a concrete idea of what is under observation. A clash actually is a matter of power where partners lose control and rules are put aside. Popitz's idea had already been pointed out by Fromm in his *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (1970) and *Anatomy of human destructivity* (1973) where he underlined how society and its rules control human basic instincts. Nevertheless, it should be recognized that some forms of violence are positive when it is about reacting promptly in front of danger; others are definitely negative, destructive, offensive, non-adaptive, self-conclusive. Moreover, what is called *invisible violence* should not be neglected Žižek (2007) with its two faces, symbolic as for language and forms and systemic as for political economic and social systems. A society characterized by frenetic rhythms could result in the incapacity to keep up pace with times and new models. Among these novelties, a new redistribution of works, new roles in family and relation hardships tend to exacerbate tensions and individual repression. This situation could trigger violent acts against the partner. The social dimension in which individuals experience their daily life is an independent variable which is pivotal when developing aggressive behaviour. Violence against another person becomes an outlet for social motivations going from the impossibility to have a job to the incapacity to maintain intimate relations.

(...) he told me I needed him...you can't live without me, I'm your life (...) I give you all you want (...) but you must do what I tell you to do, if not, there is nothing more for you (Rosy_45 years, F, degree);

(...) I feel ashamed, but when I saw her getting ready, I couldn't help provoking her till the hands (...) (Silvestro_42 years, M, degree);

(...) He told me `Do this way, do that way` and I obeyed (...) when he stopped, I told him that I was more mature, that I was not jealous, that I trusted him and that if he did not trust me, it was because perhaps he did something wrong (...) maybe. For me it was a sort of rematch, I've always resisted his aggressions (Viola_42 years, F, diploma).

Canetti (1960) maintained that long-lasting force could turn into power. Therefore, power is a force which lasts over time. Instead, violence does not last. Nevertheless, this implies excluding a relation between power and violence. Moreover, force underpins the perverted addiction between the victim and the oppressor. The oppressor thinks of it as force = violence = power; the victim as force = resistance = power. This violent power is embedded by husbands, friends and acquaintances. Violence is perpetrated by strangers and implies a persistent assumption that the feminine body can be violated, offended and humiliated – sexually too – as a punishment or revenge, by eliminating women's right to own their bodies, the space in which they live and the relations with others.

Violence against women presents some specific elements that make it different from other forms of violence. It is linked unavoidably to the way in which the public and private spheres coexist and the respective roles of sexes in these spheres. Not only have relations among sexes led to a differentiated access to socially relevant resources (prestige, richness, power), but they also continue to encompass women's dependence on men and men's power over women's body. This is the result of an identity-related issue linked to identification and new perspectives for women. The repetition of brutal violent acts against women should be explained in its historical context. Two variables should be considered: personal identity in men and women which is not acquired once and for all but is linked to times, roles and society; and power not as a physical force, but as an ensemble of expressive features transferred to identity and socio-economic status. Simmel had already pointed at some hints concerning social issues as he said: *"If the relation between sexes is taken to its extreme, i.e. to the master-slave relation, the master has the privilege not to be forced to repeat continually that he is the master. Instead, the slave cannot forget it. It should be recognized that women are more likely to forget that they are women rather than a man would forget that he is a man"* (Simmel, 1911, 2001, p. 92).

Giddens (1995) too explains the nexus between modern male violence and female sexual freedom by saying that women no longer accept sexual predominance and both sexes have to deal with this new perspective. And he continues by saying that a large part of male violence is triggered by disorientation and inadequacy. Violence is the destructive reaction to the decline of female complicity.

Some researchers suggest that flirts prevent people from dangerous liaisons (Patanè, 2008). Could it be true? What is the reason that pushes a partner to be obsessed with controlling the other?

We met on a chat and we have been together for 6 months. We had our ups and downs, we looked for each other but we ended up quarrelling, then we quit and then we started again until he (...) (Honey_28 years, F, Diploma).

In many cases, violence perpetration is a way of restoring legitimacy, test the limits and mark the territory. Our society is beset by violence, accuses, and violent expectations which translate into a way of imposing the self and the group (Bauman, 2001).

The principles of freedom, personal autonomy and equality have remained dangerously linked to complementarity in private spheres. This datum has been questioned by a transformation of fundamental rights - based mainly on equality irrespective of sex, race, language, religion, social status - that have been forced at a certain point to cope with differences in the name of the right to grant a specific treatment depending on those same differences characterizing the subjects holding those rights. This was worth the creation of the rights of identity (Ferrari, 1997, p. 16).

The cultural issue imposes itself again since the violability and control of the female body which was recognized by law, culture and social practices in the past, is still supported nowadays implicitly not only by sexist behaviour but also by the violent acts perpetrated against women of all statuses. Furthermore, in modern society violence is

prohibited and personal freedom is considered as the basis of all social relations. Nevertheless, it has also been recognized or tolerated implicitly that women are less free to manage their body and to receive a proper recognition on social and juridical levels of their home care. In other words, despite the affirmation of fundamental rights, it seems that Kofi Annan, then President of the United Nations, rightly said that violence against women is likely to be the most outrageous form of breach of fundamental rights. Violence against women knows neither boundaries nor culture nor richness. Until we stop it, we won't be able to say that we have achieved real progress towards equality, development and peace (Kofi Annan, 1999). Even western developed and modern societies seem not to have learnt the lesson. Control and force over individuals reaching obsessive and compulsive actions meant to impose personal power over the other continue to loiter among people. It is therefore evident that cultural legacies concern modern societies too and their social relations. Women should be protected by people in general, not only by legislators. It is about preventing women from being considered as minor holders of rights despite men towards the hegemony of the male. If equal opportunities are possible, it is precisely because these differences exist. It is better not to opt for a mono-sexual perspective as it was the case in past times, to avoid the recrudescence of some risks. If the legislator is the only person dealing with these issues, the result will be the underlining of differences among the two sexes which are two not by chance in a duality that was symbolically expressed as female difference. Therefore, greater awareness against violence should be included in the path towards citizenship rights through a steady engagement from both women and men. This battle should be fought on multiple levels, including socialization and construction of sexual identities, culture and education, law and enforcement, jobs and institutions and daily life. A liquid society unable to develop a sense of community knows no limits, is individualistic and with identity without relations. A liquid society has the illusion of expanding horizontally with no hierarchies and building up "pure" and intimate relations with no responsibility and therefore hybridizing the equilibrium between individualization and norm.

Societies should also remember that human rights are not the result of natural laws, but of human civilization, thus changeable over time in a process of transformation and enlargement (Bobbio, 1989).

Consequently, when left alone, norms are not sufficient to regulate social relations. Habermas maintained in 1983 that legality can draw legitimacy only when it comes from a rational procedure rich in moral contents. In other words, a single law cannot solve the problems of a society in which social relations can be understood, interpreted and explained considering the values, norms and sanctions envisaged in the context in which actions occur.

8. Conclusions

The present study is a reflexion which underlines that, beyond the already known forms of violence, the precondition underpinning violence perpetration in intimate

relations is the physical violence that a man exerts on a woman and the resistance that in turn a woman shows to the man in order to keep her control. In other words, the ambivalence of the relation is exalted by violence perpetrated brutally on the woman and a subtle violence that the woman perpetrates on the man in return. The deriving hypothesis is that both partners exert this form of power reciprocally.

Force and violence and force and resistance as power

Table 3

| | | |
|--------------|----------------------------|---|
| Men | Force = violence = power | (...) <i>I feel ashamed, but when I saw her getting ready, I couldn't help provoking her till the hands (...)</i> |
| Women | force = resistance = power | (...) <i>He told me "Do this way, do that way" and I obeyed (...). when he stopped, I told him that I was more mature, that I was not jealous, that I trusted him and that if he did not trust me, it was because perhaps he did something wrong (...) maybe. For me it was a sort of rematch, I've always resisted his aggressions (...)</i> |

This kind of awareness allows for the rethinking of violence in a relation of reciprocity. The victim and the oppressor want to be sure of controlling the other in a dynamic in which the concept of confidence, of both of partners, should be reviewed, remodelled and reformulated. Stability does not mean freedom. The combination could be illusive. Stability means protection from three types of suffering which endanger human beings: suffering from the body, suffering from outside worlds suffering from relations with others. If stability can generate dependence, freedom means separation and autonomy. It is therefore desirable to compare these two assumptions: "Freedom without confidence is destined to generate the same degree of unhappiness that confidence without freedom" (Bauman, 2001, p. 58). It should be recognized that women need a safer environment in order to be protected. All human beings share the same rights and duties, all share the same fears and the need for stability. Societies should promote the education of emotions, the respect for others with their diversities since what we are is properly the result of relations occurring among human beings. Identity is but a social construction and we build our own identity thanks to the others and what others represent for us. This path towards reflexion and transformation of personal identity and daily life in the light of empowerment, complexity, compatibility between market logics and reciprocity should be kept in mind:

Self-analysis (socio = individual) and self-observation - that are more and more necessary- generate on the one hand biographical co-action in narrating (and producing a unity), and on the other hand the countless facets and fragments of personal life (...) a new perspective is therefore present (or a socially binding narrative space) which broadens private life beyond regions, nations, worlds. (Beck, 1997, p. 48).

The path that lots of women started during the last decades toward the self as an element inseparable from the body, culture and social practice should be handed down to youngsters and progenies. Men should share this view too to build a new identity, find new ways of communicating and embrace new forms of self-realization which eliminate destructive logics of abuse. This process should start with the young, both boys and girls, who need more to be educated in the spirit of citizenship and feelings rather than of sex. Many sociologists underlined in peculiar ways, during years, schools have a strong impact on children and youngsters' personal development (Durkheim, 1903), and therefore they should translate confused ideas of moral conscience into precise and distinct notions, by offering multiple interpretations of different facets to social facts. This suggests also a new role for gender education and knowledge during school attendance by students, premise of a more in-depth awareness about intercourse relations.

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